W. HADLEY
THIS BLIND MAN RUNS A CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND
Clark, Neil M.

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This Blind Man Runs a Correspondence School for the Blind

DURING the Christmas holidays, nine years ago, a teacher in one of the Chicago high schools had a severe attack of the grip and was compelled to lie abed for several days. He had not entirely recovered when school reopened; but he obstinately insisted upon rising and resuming his duties.

A tragedy was the result. This teacher, William A. Hadley, had been troubled with his eyes before. Now the condition was aggravated. Within a few weeks of his premature "recovery," he became totally blind!

Opportunity, it seems, can choose strange disguises; for this great misfortune turned out to be Mr. Hadley's chance for service in a broader field than had ever before come his way: As a direct result of his blindness, he has undertaken a work that already has carried his name to tens of thousands of people in every state in the United States, and even abroad.

It was a strange institution he founded, possibly the only one of its kind—a correspondence school for the blind.

"My blindness," he says, "was a misfortune in more senses than one. I was far from wealthy; and when I lost my sight and my accustomed means of earning a livelihood, the burden of support fell heavily on my family. In addition I had to struggle against the feeling that I was no longer of any use in the world. As I became adjusted to my situation, I tutored a few students privately, but only a few; and there were five long years of idleness when I fought to believe that somehow, somewhere, there must come again an opportunity to use the abilities I had spent the better part of a lifetime cultivating."

MABEL SYKES

William A. Hadley, who lost his sight nine years ago, is now head of a world-wide correspondence school for the blind. Mr. Hadley was formerly a high-school teacher in Chicago, but had to resign when his sight failed. Soon after this the idea for his present school came to him. He has hundreds of blind pupils, some of whom live in foreign countries, and who are educating themselves through the courses he gives

Mr. Hadley, be it said, possessed degrees from two universities, and had studied at two others. His teaching expe-rience had been varied and thorough.

"The opportunity I wanted," he continued, "finally came in a curious way: the Rev. L. B. Plumar, a minister from the East, called at our house, and happened to notice a book in Braille on the porch. Braille, you know, is the raised type used in printing for the blind. I mastered it soon after I lost my sight.

"This minister mentioned a blind woman, a member of his congregation, who had few interests. Then he asked this casual question:

"'Could she learn Braille by correspondence?'

"The idea of correspondence courses for the blind had never occurred to me, and neither then nor later did I discover anybody else who had thought of it. But instantly it suggested to me a work, a service, an opportunity, such as I had long looked for in vain.

"I knew that the vast majority of the blind were poorly educated and hopelessly shut out from normal intellectual activity. I believed I saw a chance to do something worth-while to change that condition. Indeed, I immediately began writing to the superintendents of institutions for the blind in various states. In my enthusiasm I even made tentative outlines of courses.

"The first tangible result was a letter that reached me in 1920. A blind woman in Wichita, Kansas, wrote to ask if I could give her some instruction by mail. She had heard of me through the superintendent of the school for the blind in her state. I replied, saying that what I had in mind was experimental, but that if she was willing to try to learn, I was willing to try to teach her. So she became my first pupil.

"For her I worked up a great deal of material, sent her books to study, assigned lessons, had her prepare replies to questions and send them on to be graded and returned. In short, I went ahead on the plan used in correspondence instruction everywhere. When she had learned to read the Braille, I pointed out how she might continue her studies, and I eagerly turned to securing other students.

"I had no means to carry on anything extensive. I soon discovered, however, that a worthy task finds willing hands to help. Some neighbors became interested and helped to interest others. Funds were provided to send Mrs. Hadley and me to a meeting of workers for the blind held in Iowa. There I told what I had in mind and had already done, and the convention endorsed my plan.

"From then the school has grown steadily. The raised-type magazines circulating among the blind mentioned the work, and the resulting demand for courses renewed the interest of my friends, who made themselves responsible for organizing and incorporating a school under state laws. A budget was raised which enabled us to secure printing machines to emboss and print the books needed for the work, to meet the expenses of an office, and to pay me a salary, as well as to pay others employed to help me.

"Applications for courses soon came faster than we could handle them. At first, I had been doing the work in our home. Soon, however, we rented offices over a store, where we still are.

"In 1922, the first full year of operation, we had two hundred and sixty-one students. As students completed their studies, many dropped out, of course. The present enrollment is three hundred and fifty. Students are enrolled from forty-four states, and from Canada, China, India, Australia, and the Philippines.

"We have embossed nine books, and printed many copies of these on machines operated by our own hands. Among other tasks, we had to find time to write five special textbooks, in addition to the standard texts used. Our courses range from one on the appreciation and writing of short stories, which is very popular to business correspondence, salesmanship, psychology, history, literature, civil government, Latin, French, algebra, science, and so on.

"There are twenty courses at present, and we add others as students want them in sufficient numbers to justify the expense. Just now we have a waiting list of twenty-one students who want a course in life insurance salesmanship. Besides the courses, we maintain a circulating library, from which we send out books to every part of the country.

"There is no charge for instruction. As I told you, the blind are mostly very poor. We have had prospective students who said they could not take courses because they lacked the money for stamps and for paper on which to write!

"Our students are very diversified in talent, age, occupation, and location. We limit instructions to adults, and have a few who are more than seventy years old! My last letter was to a young woman student in Montana. The one before that was to a blind colored minister in Florida, also a student. This man, by the way, is most enthusiastic, and wants every course we offer; he has just started psychology.

"In some cases, we seem to have enabled students to increase their earning capacity. For instance, a blind young man in Montreal was making brooms, but earned very little. He took our course in salesmanship, and with our help persuaded his father to let him try *selling* brooms. We have had many enthusiastic letters from him since. In the last one he said he was netting thirty-six dollars a week.

"There have been other cases of modest but substantial economic success following the studies, but I think our greater service is that we give the blind—who would otherwise have to spend most of their time in idle darkness—useful mental occupation. We enable them to enter into the life of the world, and to feel that they too can *do* and *live*.

"That is what the blind want most. When we were starting, I remember suggesting to a woman that if she could not read Braille, she might have regular texts read to her by others.

"'But that is not the same thing!' she protested. 'It means so much *to do it yourself!*'

"And that is true. Unfortunately, most people, when they do anything for the blind, give them what the blind do not want—*pity*. The blind want *opportunity*."

NEIL M. CLARK

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